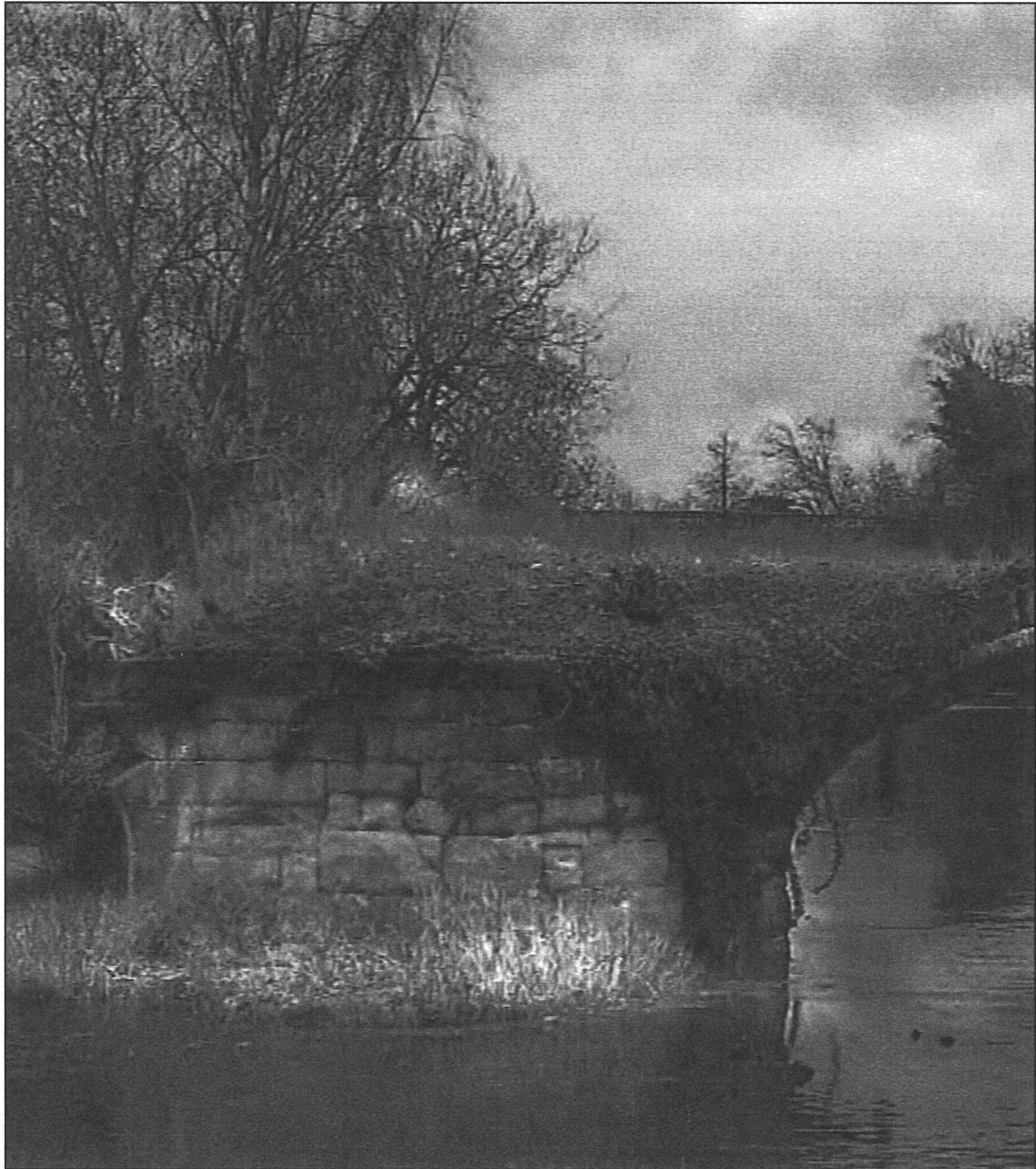


# **The Minstrel**

Redeemer University College's Poetry and Fiction Magazine



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 Joel Rusthoven

*Your beliefs will be the light by which you see, but they will not be what you see and they will  
 not be a substitute for seeing.*

*Flannery O'Connor*

*The Minstrel* is Redeemer University College's Creative Writing magazine featuring the short stories and poetry of Redeemer University College students. Works chosen for publication are selected by the Editor and Assistant Editor, Joyce Alblas and Melissa Bacon, and reviewed by the Faculty Advisor, Prof. Hugh Cook. *The Minstrel* is published twice a year and printed by Digital Art & Graphics Inc.

## Caroline

The coffin is closed and the aroma of roses fills the air. It is her funeral today, and I have come to say good-bye. Her portrait is centered on top of the ebony casket. The picture is large and the oil paint is thick; it was painted by her sister who died long ago. An ornate gold-leaf frame surrounds the image. She looks both regal and austere, with her chestnut hair woven into a single braid, sitting like a crown on top of her head. Her eyes are coal-black, looking straight ahead. The red lips, painted the same shade of scarlet I have always seen her wear, are slightly smiling, but not quite. She is wearing a single strand of white pearls and the round neck of her black dress circles just below her jutting collarbone. As I study the likeness, I am reminded of the day I first met her.

She must have thought me strange that day; an obviously pregnant woman at her doorstep looking for singing lessons. I was to sing at a wedding in a month and I thought she could help me brush up on technique. Her eyes must have rolled but I never saw it; she didn't reveal too much of herself to me, not at first anyway. But then, I had been warned about her; she was strange, too. She had two cats named after Greek gods, and her Doberman was named Victoria. The burgundy brocade wallpaper covering every wall and the French lace curtains smothering every window gave me a feeling of claustrophobia. I felt as though I had just walked out of a sun-filled meadow into a Bohemian burrow. And then there was the smoke. Her ceiling had a yellow tinge from the fumes of her 3-pack-a-day habit.

But we got along fine and, over time, her eccentricities became normal to me. In fact, I liked her all the more because of them. Her shrill voice, shouting out "la, la, la's," almost sounded like music to me. She told me "the mirror is the singer's best friend" and gave me tips on keeping my throat clear and my breathing even. She recorded songs for me to sing and closed her eyes, as if in ecstasy, as I played the diva while singing into the mike attached to the portable amplifier. She wrote a list of "commandments" in my exercise book, and kept reminding me to "breathe where it is grammatically correct." She had no idea that I knew nothing about grammar.

The wedding came and went but we practised for other occasions, and we practised for nothing at all. My lessons were supposed to be an hour but I often spent the entire afternoon or evening there. When I left I went straight home and took a shower; the smell of smoke was embarrassingly strong. She told me about her past; how she had been the youngest child, and very bright. She had been two years ahead at school but this was no advantage to her; she was left alone by the others and made to feel an outsider. She talked little of her mother and mostly of her father; he was a lawyer and her hero. As she spoke of him her eyes glazed over and turned from mine. When she spoke of her sisters her eyes blazed and bore into mine. Not that her sisters were so bad, just that they were so *there*. Because one of them sang a particular song, she was not allowed to sing it. Because one of them needed time to practise on piano, she could not practise. Because one of them painted, she was not allowed to paint. That Christmas I gave her a set of watercolours.

When I decided to take piano lessons she simply said "fine" and switched instruments. Her voice was able to rest and her fingers started to do the work. We decided that I should start from the very beginning, but we quickly moved up to grade three and went on from there. Her voice stopped singing out the scales and started to yell out instructions. "You're not counting," she would scream, as I played half-notes as quarter-notes and dotted-wholes as dotted-halves. She would beat on the piano bench with knobby knuckles and yell out, "one-a-half-a, two-a-half-a..." until I finally got it right. She sat with her head cocked to the side, listening and ready to record my mistakes in my book. She always knew when I hadn't practised and made a note of it in my dictation book – "PRACTISE" – in bold letters, underlined in red.

And yet, it's not the music lessons I recall so fondly as much as her stories. She told me about her children and their comings and goings. Often her daughters were there when I had a lesson and then we hardly ever looked at a sheet of music; we talked about their lives. I marveled that she could make all the dresses for her daughter's wedding; they chose pure silk. And so, when the marriage broke up a year later I felt sorry that she had worked so hard to make it perfect. She showed me pictures of her sons and read letters from her grandchildren. She was proud of all her children, the sons from her first marriage and the daughters from her



second. Her second husband had long since died, but her first husband was still alive. She spoke of him fondly, but sadly, as she told me the details of their divorce. It was a shame that his “preference” had been the cause of the break-up. He lived with his partner in New York and she hadn’t seen him for many years.

She had mystical ideas about all sorts of things. Years ago, when she had cancer she gave it the name “Bill” and instructed him to go away. He never came back. The day her appendix burst she told herself that this wasn’t her time to die, and so, as a result, she lived. One day, when I visited her and she answered the door looking bloated and feeble she said, “I may look like a disgruntled chipmunk, but I am not.” And so, she was not. She told me that her red Datsun, Lucy, was the best car in the world and would never let her down since the headlights had “blinked at her” when she looked at it in the showroom. She could talk herself into anything or out of everything. I knew her stories were stories, but they were true to her, and I believed them for as long as I was with her.

After some time, life got too busy for music lessons, but I still visited her or dropped by when I thought she might be home. I went to see her when I found out she was in hospital. She was sitting up in bed, looking pale without her red lipstick, and oddly common without her coiled braid. Her hair hung loose over her thin shoulders and an oxygen mask was hanging by a thin elastic strap below her chin. We chatted a while, and when it was time to go I gave her a quick hug, and we said good-bye. It was the first of a number of visits, and when she called me from the retirement home to tell me she had been let out of hospital I told her I would come and visit her there.

I visited her at the home quite often. I took chocolates and magazines, and she told me stories about her bingo and card games. She was agitated the day she told me she had lost all her money in a bingo game, which meant she wouldn’t be able to play in the up-coming tournament. I asked her how much it cost to play. She said, “A nickel a game.” I emptied my wallet of change and told her to have a good time. That was the last time I saw her.

There is a low humming noise in the funeral home as more people come into the room and murmur among themselves. I recognize her sons from the pictures she has shown me and make my way to where they stand to offer my condolences. Her daughters are settling themselves into a line near the guest book so I stand behind the huddle of people and wait my turn to sign the book, hug each daughter, and tell them I will miss their mother. They thank me for coming and tell me they will miss her too. There is nothing more to say.

I pass the shiny black casket, now surrounded by sprays of flowers, as I make my way to the door. The eyes in the portrait seem to follow me and I stop to look at her image for the last time. “Good-bye, Caroline,” I whisper. “I will miss you.”

As I push through the heavy oak doors and walk toward the parking lot I notice a hearse waiting by the side of the building. It is black with silver scroll-like embellishments running along the side from the front wheel-well all the way to the back bumper. Behind the spotless, chrome-framed windows I see plush velvet curtains and realize that they are the same shade of burgundy as the wallpaper that lined the walls of Caroline’s home. The vehicle is polished to a high shine and I think it looks fit for royalty. But then, Caroline was royalty. She was the most extraordinary person I have ever known.

Joyce Alblas

**who have we become?**

four years since high school  
funny where life takes us  
and how we all change

two engagements—  
one broken  
four weddings  
three kids  
two trips to Australia

we have become  
plumbers  
welders  
construction workers  
teachers  
accountants  
pilots—  
while my best friends  
and I  
rarely talk

are we really who we  
thought we'd be?

Donna Dykstra

**An open letter to the rain:**

I know your tears  
are meant to wash my wounds  
but they only spill and pool  
what was bleeding very little  
till veins much more than varicose bloom  
as red, angry root  
to dry out atop my skin  
from being above instead of in.

Nathan Stretch

## **Happily Ever After**

Once upon a time we were full of dreams,  
busy planning when we would have the kids,  
the Ford Explorer, the four-bedroom house,  
the dream vacations, the ultimate life.  
You built the house as I raised the three kids,  
paid for it all, while I played soccer-mom.

Now the kids are grown and every morning  
when you leave for work I am left behind  
in the silent house full of all our stuff  
you worked hard to buy – the fast computer,  
designer drapes and household furnishings,  
big screen TV and home theatre system –  
all the stuff we thought would make us happy.

At night you come home, toss your stinky socks  
next to the crumpled black and green work pants  
and plaid flannel shirt on ceramic tiles  
you painstakingly laid eight years ago  
when the house was new. You're a self-made man  
with a perfect wife who cleans dirty clothes  
but doesn't know you anymore.

Donna Dykstra

## **Mourning**

He's gone now  
She paints pictures  
to hang on the wall  
to remember

If you go  
what will I make  
to hang on the wall  
to remember

Joyce Alblas

## The Train Station

Ours is the eight o'clock train to Beerville. My sister Isabella is excited about going back to the small town where we were born, but it feels kind of ironic that we're taking a train to get there. Nevertheless, here we are, sitting on a bench near the tracks at the great big Prince George Train Station.

But I'm not telling you the whole truth. The town isn't really called Beerville, but it's certainly done a good job earning that name for itself, though. No, Fern Pond is a quaint little town, situated deep in the heart of British Columbia's beautiful Lake District. I'm pretty sure that's what the tourist brochures say. The reality is slightly less picturesque. Fern Pond is a small town where the kids all want to get high and get out and move on to the city, wherever that might be. There's a Seven Eleven, a restaurant called Rosie's, a local school that looks like an old factory, and not much else. In Fern Pond you're either very rich or very drunk.

Anyway, I guess I should get on with telling you about all this. Isabella and I have been sitting on this stupid bench for the last hour. We've seen all sorts of stuff. Some short British man with a briefcase and giant suitcase sat beside us for a while. He seemed nice enough, but I don't think he'd ever heard of deodorant. I never knew such a stench could come from such a finely clad gentleman. I was thinking about talking to him about hygiene and all, but he left before I could say anything. Maybe he realized that I was picking up his scent and he couldn't stand the embarrassment he was so obviously feeling.

"James Bond!" Isabella whispered to me as the man got up to leave. "Look! He's even got the black suit and the slick, black hair. And he's British!"

She's only eleven years old, so she still gets psyched out by things like that, I guess. I waited for the man to walk away and then turned to Isabella, saying, "He could be. I wonder if he's coming along with us to check out Beerville."

"Don't call it that!" Isabella shot back, tears coming to her eyes. Mom always got mad at me when I called Fern Pond by its other name, especially in front of Isabella. She always said Isabella was too young to understand why we left the place. She would have been about a year old when we left. I was seven and I can remember the whole thing. All Isabella has are those dumb photo albums full of pictures of our two smiling parents. It's amazing how easily you can lie to someone with pictures. Fern Pond is a peaceful place, with beautiful mountains covered in trees. Everyone lives in lovely little log cabins, blissfully making do with the bare essentials of life. Isabella never thinks of Fern Pond in any other way.

Boy, is she in for a disappointment! She already took Mom's death pretty hard. I don't blame her. It hit me hard, too. Mom was being her overprotective single mother self that morning, getting me and Isabella off to school. That night Mom's mangled, lifeless body was found on the train tracks in the middle of Prince George. Now, three months later, we're being sent straight back to the town we came from to live with our Dad. I guess Social Services figures we'll be better off that way. Maybe they're right. Dad's phoned us five times since he was notified telling us how excited he is about seeing us.

"Your mother never let me talk to you much," he said in one conversation, "so we've got a lot of catching up to do!"

Isabella's taking it all pretty hard, but she still believes that she's going to live in a paradise. Every time I try to tell her different she gets mad, saying that Mom, if she were here, would yell at me for saying that kind of stuff.

The only things I remember about Fern Pond are my Dad and all the drinking. I used to know kids who were going through the same things I was. They told me about the screaming and the smashing. My Dad shattered one of my Mom's favourite wind chimes. She'd gotten that thing from her mother. The sounds of the dismembered pieces shooting across the floor and the shouting and screaming of our parents are as vivid now as they were ten years ago. The other kids were kind of impressed when I told them that story, I guess. Sometimes, at school during lunch, I'd sit with those kids and we'd swap Mommy and Daddy stories. I used to envy the teenagers. They could go out drinking and deal with Mommy and Daddy that way. We couldn't.

We weren't old enough to hang with the real guys. We were on the front lines and all we had was each other. I guess that sounds kind of gay and cliché . . . .

I wish I could believe the pictures in the photo albums. I wish I could tell myself that I'm going to paradise. Deep down, I wish we could all live in one of those wonderful log cabins, together again and without a care in the world.

Sometimes I even fantasize about it. I imagine Mom, Dad, Isabella, and I all living in some cabin out in the woods somewhere, divorced completely from Beerville and from the past. There's a lush garden in front of our cabin, filled with all sorts of things, like orchids and stuff. I weed the garden – we all do – and everything is clean.

My sister nudges me. "Come on, Harland," she says, "it's here!"

I watch the VIA train slow to a stop before us. Clumps of people move toward it as Isabella and I stand up, preparing to take our own place among the multitude. I'm scared. Walking toward the train I notice the short British man sitting on a bench close to the tracks. He's staring at me with a pensive look on his face. He picks up his smelly self, his briefcase and his giant suitcase and follows us onto the train. It looks like I was right about one thing.

Kevin VanDenBreenen

### Summer Ceremony

10:03 am in the strawberry field  
To the chorus of birds and cricket  
I kneel, the straw imprinting my bare knees  
with crisscrossed red lines  
like the lines of a highway map  
The sun warms my head and back  
and heightens the patch's perfume  
fragrance of ripe berries  
rot of the passed over and past due  
aroma of straw and rich earth  
The dew collects on my hands  
as I grasp plump, luscious berries  
Some thud into my basket  
where they lie in a heap of mottled reds  
Others land in my mouth  
tart and tangy  
or sweet and juicy  
the nectar of summer days

Suzanne denBoer

## A Quest

A possession, a trophy of pride  
An obsession, never satisfied  
One night session, promises denied  
Short-lived fling  
No big thing  
Pleasure

Love presentation, for obedience  
Love's precondition, ideal performance  
An obligation, with no assurance  
Expectations  
Manipulations  
Capture

A commitment, but always parting  
An allurements, but ever longing  
An involvement, but . . . draining  
Meaningless  
It's hopeless  
Lost

Is there a love that's true?  
One that does not conclude?  
Is there a love that's sound?  
In my Father, truth I've found:

Love in its essence, makes me see  
World's love dance, can't give real love free  
Perfect love so immense, demands no fee  
Works not needed  
Love completed  
Beautiful

Sarah Slotegraaf

## The Killing Tree

They call it the killing tree. Years ago its boughs were laden with apple blossoms in the spring and fist-sized McIntoshes in the early fall. But wormwood took it at the core and squeezed the sap out till its branches were brittle and leafless. It died soon after they found Garret hanging from his own noose. That was three years ago a week this Wednesday.

Winter.

Maybe it was the February weather that did it. There had been no sun since January 28<sup>th</sup> of that year. Maybe the dank halfdark soaked through his jacket and snuffed out the embers of hope. I saw them burn from black to orange when he inhaled. Sometimes I would watch him draw with pursed lips on the end of a joint and then stare at the burning end, holding the smoke inside, till his eyes watered or the joint burned down to scorch his fingers. He smoked up out by the apple tree in the field beside his house or in the fish hut he built wigwam-style out of pine boughs out on Spruce Lake.

He'd drive out to the lake on his 1973 skidoo. The writing on the hood had peeled off with the finish. The seat's upholstery had been replaced with innumerable duct tape patches and the runner boards were rusting away. But he drove the snot out of that thing, flying down the sled trail to the lake. Once he crashed it into a poplar tree and busted off one of its skis.

He kept the thing going though, even after the snow had melted in the spring; he'd fly down the Ridge Road, engine snarling and gravel catching in the bogies and spinning out sideways like gunshots. Freda, the crazy feminist redneck who lives in the shack next to Bill Scrief's place, saw Garret roaring up the road on his skidoo one day in July when she was re-shingling her roof in the buff. When he ripped past her house she heaved her hammer at him but missed the sled by a hand. When Garret came back down the road she was standing by the ditch, naked as Eve except for her tool belt and a mesh-backed Huskavarna hat turned backwards on her head. She gave him the bird when he buzzed by but she got pelted by the spray of gravel.

I laughed pretty hard then.

Kinda makes me smile now, too. But standing knee-deep in snow under the killing tree brings me back to the fact that Garret's not here no more and his sled is rusting away behind his parents' house. Patches of bark still cling to the tree but much of the trunk is bare and drilled with woodpecker holes. Termite trails snake up from the roots.

I'm standing under the branch that held the rope he hung himself from.

He had seated himself astride the thick branch while he tied the rope around it three times before knotting it to hold. His long, greasy black hair hung about his face as he wrapped the end of the rope around and around before sliding it back through to hold the noose in place. Then he put the rope over his head like a neck tie and lit a joint as he leaned back against the tree trunk. He closed his eyes as he inhaled and held the smoke inside him till his head began to nod.

Then he just fell out of the tree and picked up the half-smoked joint. It was a fatty: the last of his stash. I rolled the joint back and forth between my thumb and forefinger as I stared at the tree. The tears froze in my eyes – an icy veneer. Garret's image was blurred and distorted, like I was looking at him from under the ice of Spruce Lake.

I'm standing in the same spot now, looking up to where Garret hung like a marionette on a string. My feet are cold. I'd like to fly but I think I should walk. Just so I remember what it's like to scuff the earth like a human trudging through life. So I remember Garret's heavy steps as he pushed through the snow on his way to the apple tree.

As I stand in the golgothic shadow of the killing tree I hear, in the dead -40° air, the chirping of a cardinal singing from the topmost branch: wintersong.

At the sound I look up to the pine-forested hills. The setting sun sketches contours of crimson on the clouded February sky: divine chiaroscuro.



## A Handful of Haikus

Fruitless highway fields  
harvest high arched aliens  
armed with hydro wire.

Drowned ant in my paw  
still carries a sprouting seed  
in his half-slacked jaw.

For now they believe  
a goldfish naps belly up.  
Young grief makes you lie.

My son plays summer's  
green horn, blowing a fresh blade  
between his small thumbs.

Barbed sunbeams unlock  
pink feathered flower petals  
from coops of flat ice.

What's this! Two spiders  
entwine in my tent corner  
while I watch, alone?

Adele Konyndyk

**Impending Winter Conceals Her Doom**  
**In The Body Of My Paramour**

The sweaters of fall  
are impossibly soft  
they shrink in the chilly weather  
to grip above the hips  
grip just beneath your breasts.

And so you are  
in jeans and mittens—  
kind of cold;

pouring smoke from your lips.

\* \* \*

The summer was brilliant,  
we bloomed with pigment;  
the petals pushed together  
in a pattern of deceit  
to conceal what was underneath.  
The fragrance of tanning  
was unapologetic;  
no oils or creams to hide its authenticity:  
the brash, bold scent of invincibility.

I was closer to the sun back then  
but I was less in danger of burning.

Now, in autumn, I am thin,  
brittle, the veins in my hands  
quite visible under broken skin.  
The smell of impending ignition,  
the inside of a matchbox,  
the tang of anticipation  
on my tongue.

I will go out in a bright, clean flame.  
The sensation is really more like freezing.

Nathan Stretch

### **Drowning Season**

Winter is blurred and grey  
We inch through in submarines  
with windows tightly sealed,  
gazing out at brown seaweed  
that reaches for a distant sun.  
Fish are few, many gone  
in schools to warmer waters.  
There are no songs here,  
only faint echoes in our ears.  
Rain does not drop, nor fall,  
but drifts over us in currents.  
The air inside is suffocating,  
but to venture out is to wade  
through cold that seeps in  
despite our heavy masks and suits.

Robyn Konyndyk

### **Enough**

I can smell the summer air  
A breath, the whispering wind  
I can see the golden light fall down  
And trees of green, so wondrous fair

That I should be so blessed  
With this undying grace  
This seeming loveliness  
Hiding a greater holiness

Elena Oorebeek

### **Who Do You Think You Are?**

That haughty look, those eyes that smugly stare  
don't think that I don't know what you're about.  
You think that you can cut me with your glare.

I mind my business, sitting on my chair.  
You sit and watch me with your taunting pout;  
that haughty look, those eyes that smugly stare.

You're like a silent snake, tail poised in air.  
You sneak and peek and slither, body stout.  
You think that you can cut me with your glare.

The gift of love is one that is most rare;  
is not displayed with scornful words and shouts;  
that haughty look, those eyes that smugly stare.

You smile and smirk, a lion in your lair.  
Eyes flicker, with your glance you cast me out.  
You think that you can cut me with your glare.

But looks and gestures cannot strip me bare.  
I will dismiss them; they will have no clout;  
that haughty look, those eyes that smugly stare.  
You think that you can cut me with your glare.

Joyce Alblas

## Promise

Of his twenty birthdays, I have known him for approximately sixteen. I could take the clichéd route and admit that we knew each other while in our mothers' wombs, but I don't actually remember him stealing my cake until we were four.

The cake was always chocolate with white icing, stored in a big round Tupperware container so old that the plastic was soft and flexible. There was always Kool-Aid to drink out of sippy cups. There were always brown crumbs around his small pink mouth.

I had been there for the seventh birthday when he was given the Toronto Blue Jays tickets, the twelfth when he got the Sega Genesis and the eighteenth when his parents finally gave him permission to buy his own car. On his twentieth birthday the car was parked outside of his house, his blue factory-issued coveralls hung in the closet by the back door and he flashed around a small silver cell-phone – a gift from his girlfriend of two years.

On the day he turned twenty, the sun was warm but the breeze was cool. The end of summer was nearing and I'd be leaving for college again in a matter of days. Life here at home would continue on without me, but at a different, quicker pace, and with a colder sun. But on that day, none of that mattered. We were all there, and he was turning twenty.

Some things never change, though; his favourite gift that year was an impressive paintball gun his dad had picked out for him. We spent the hours between sunset and twilight running between the massive evergreens and ducking behind bushes, only to have hidden paintballs explode beneath our footsteps in the grass. The bright pink paint marked our pant legs and seeped into the soles of our shoes.

When night fell and the stars poked out from behind their curtain, we collapsed onto the grass in a circle. There was no light, save for the glowing ends of cigarettes that cast an orange shadow upon our fingertips. As voices and laughter bounced round, I rolled onto my back to take in the vast black expanse with its tiny white bulbs. The sky was massive but, surrounded by my friends, the setting only felt intimate and familiar. But in days I would be leaving again.

He walked me to my car later that night and, as I opened the driver's door, he offered: "Good luck at school." A pause. "Come back to us, okay?"

This had become a tradition every fall as I moved away for school. Always this question, always my promise.

"I will."

I would always be bound to this place, to these people, to my promise. Every fall brought fresh beginnings, but every spring brought me home. Next summer he turns twenty-one, and I will be there. As always.

Brianna Hammer

## Dirty

Trust the silence that slithers in your ear.  
A welcomed vapour  
Pressed up against the naked glass  
Hot breath escapes its pent-up cage  
Caught in a hand-sewn web  
Blind eyes embrace the immediate  
Desire lifts an opalescent hand  
Turn your face  
As searing fingers caress your silken frailty  
Lifted on the wings of a broken bird  
Ride on the images that fill your head  
The air swirls round you  
The lies of men lift you to your zenith  
Encircled by senses  
Enraptured by passion  
Wave after wave passes over twisted animal instinct  
Then – silence.  
Warm pulsing breath turns cold  
The impassioned bird is now flightless  
Broken wings come spiraling down into fierce awareness  
You remember the taste of shame, enshrouding your cheated mind  
Flashing pictures pierce your eyes  
Empty vessels now devoid of tantalizing vapour  
Promises of the damned  
Sickening evidence  
Dirty  
*Trust the silence*  
The silence does not fill  
*Believe the lies*  
The lies do not quench  
*Embrace the immediate*  
The immediate does not endure  
Weeping salty tears of bitter self-hate  
Hide the scars left by opaque fingers  
Lying in obscurity  
Waiting for the return of addictive silence  
Praying for light

Stephanie Elgersma

## The Letter and the Spirit of the thing

The sun set red the night Opa died. Dad, forced from the cottage by a too-hot fire set by an over-zealous son in the small iron stove, said, "I'm going to watch the sunset," even while the hockey game droned in the back on the TV set, even though the setting sun was Calgary-Flames-Red and we could see it quite nicely through the picture window. Opa was already in the hospital (far-away London, but not the far-away London); Mom was there with him, trying, I imagined, to staunch the flow of blood from Opa's stomach aneurysm by holding on to his hand – tight.

Dad said Opa's aorta had ruptured.

"Old people's blood vessels," he explained, "become calcified. If the calcium tube inside the vessel cracks, the surrounding muscles, lulled flaccid by years of underuse, tend to bulge and then burst. They just can't take the pressure anymore." It all made perfect sense to me. The calcium lining was like an "inside cast," set to harm rather than to heal, to encourage weakness rather than strength. An inverted cast in location and purpose, in the letter and the spirit of the thing. Calcium hubris.

Milk is a good source of calcium.

"For strong teeth and bones . . . ."

I guess Opa had drunk his limit. His body, unsatisfied for some reason or other with maintaining Opa's existing bones, had begun to build another skeleton, *inside the existing skeleton*, inside the cardiovascular system where bones were never meant to be. But the second skeleton was made to fail. The bones-inside-blood vessels had to be hollow, brittle, little bird bones, to allow for through blood flow. If blood stopped flowing, Opa would stop drinking milk, stop providing calcium, stop beating his heart – expanding/contracting his lungs. The second-skeleton was a pathetic affair, strong enough to weaken the surrounding muscles, though, ironically, it would never be strong enough to bear its own.

From outside I heard Dad yell at me to hurry for fear of missing the sunset, even though the setting sun was Calgary-Flames-Red and I could see it quite nicely through the picture window. "If you scramble," he said, "you might be able to get a picture or two. I figure you've got about thirty seconds."

By the time I collected my camera, I had missed the best shot.

Instead of snapping at the little bit of sun still above the horizon, I chased a heron. The big bird led me down the beach, landing and posing and then taking off again before I got too close. When I finally took my eye from the lens, after the heron flew away again and the light-meter reminded me of my bipodal status (in a situation where only a tripod could really do), I was about a mile down the coast. The pebbled beach shifted as I shifted. The whitewashed lighthouse out on Chantry Island silently switched on. I picked my way back uncertainly, wondering all the while how I had made it so far with only one eye. One loses depth perception when not utilizing both eyes. And peripheral vision; how had I traveled so far without my peripheral vision?

The Flames lost. Mom rang us to say that Opa was doing fine. She didn't know what we knew, that the sun had set red.

I went to bed serenely aware of Opa's mortality, calmly certain that Opa would die. Certain because the sun had set red, calmly because the sun had set, slid from the sky without incident, without violent explosion or mysterious disappearance.

Dad woke me at four. Opa had taken a turn for the worse. I got Dad some cookies from the blue bowl on top of the fridge. He made coffee; I searched for some fruit. He walked outside as I pulled a banana from the crisper.

Dad was standing, oddly lit, in the moonlight. The sun was rising somewhere behind us; the moon was setting over the lake. The sun hemorrhaged at the earth and sky divide but all we could see was the moon, flushed now with the sun's bleeding, sinking into the water.

At four-thirty AM the moon set red. Birds greeted the day. Waves crashed; bells rang muted and frantic in the distance. I went back to bed. Dad got in the car with the coffee and the cookies and the banana and drove



off toward London. I dreamed strange dreams full of inconsistencies: lighthouses turned to church steeples; they rang on all the half-pasts instead of the o'clocks.

Dad called back later to say that Opa had passed away, had slid from life to death while in an anesthesiologically-induced coma. Apparently he died at around four-thirty in the morning. Mom had tried to call soon after.

"I guess we didn't hear it ring."

Nathan Stretch

### Extreme ...

post passion  
after exhilaration  
end of the free fall  
and I'm left in the desert  
with a parachute  
and a bottle of pain medication  
I choke it down  
without the aid of water  
(there aren't any cacti  
to split open and suck dry)  
because I want to forget  
the taste of grit in my mouth  
and the never ending thirst  
that emanates from my bones  
I want to lie down  
and while I die  
remember what it was like  
to feel the wind play with my body  
at fifteen thousand feet

Bonnie Sutherland

## After the Return

The return began well.  
You laughed at my jokes  
I acted stupid, more so  
than you.

Why do bad things come  
in happy packages?

Now we're back to the  
paranoia, "back to life,  
back to reality,"  
waiting for you to strike.

Perhaps you'll steal some  
beer and go out drinking  
or maybe it will be some  
money to feed your dark  
happiness.

Kevin VanDenBreemen

## Monologue on love

Love is such a fleeting thing. It's there  
and then it's gone again, like nothing.  
You can't track it, you can't follow it.  
You can't do anything with it except pray  
that the damn thing will stay in place for  
more than a minute. It's like watching the  
clouds drift by on a sunny day; first they're  
big and poofy and then, whoosh, they're  
burnt away. Oh, and when, in fact, love  
DOES decide to stay in place, it is the most  
unbelievably complicated mess you'd ever  
want to get out of. Or into, it depends on  
how you view it. Most of the time it's just  
like you wonder why you even bothered,  
but then . . . hmm, everything seems to  
fall into place like some weird tapestry or  
symphony and it all makes sense.

Elena Oorebeek

